



ELSAH HISTORY

VILLAGE INN RESTORED

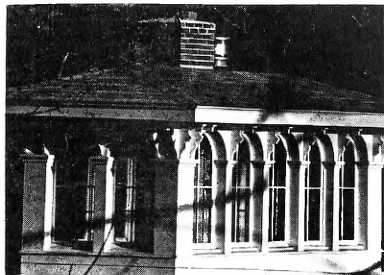
By Sara Eubank

April 1974

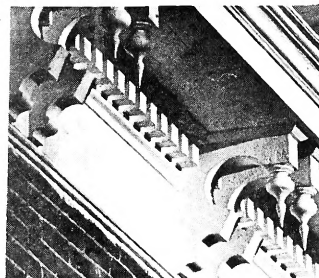
Until Ned and Paula Bradley bought, repaired, and redecorated the Village Inn recently, it had been left to sit alone and empty--left to deteriorate.

The old brick house, which was originally built in the 1850's by the Onetto family, had been handed down to various owners for different purposes. After Mr. Onetto, who was one of Elsay's first commission merchants, it was owned by Enos Doron, owner of the riverfront flour mill.

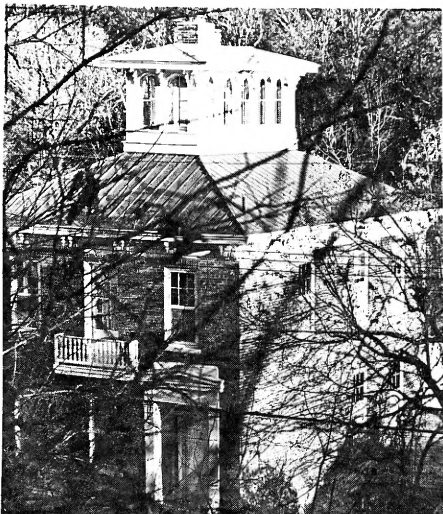
Around 1880, Doron added the cupola and the bracketed cornice that are still on the house today. Then, in 1905, the house was bought by the Worthey family and transformed into an inn, after which The Principia bought it and maintained it as The Village Inn. It is interesting to note that before Principia had even thought of buying property here at Elsay, the geology students from the St. Louis campus came to the Inn on field trips with Dr. Percival Robertson.



Village Inn Cupola



The Bracketed
Cornice



Finally, the building became too much of an expense and burden for the college to maintain so its use was discontinued. It had been neglected and was sadly in need of repair and cleaning, as well as remodeling, when the Bradleys bought it. It was not in terrible shape, but it did need some work done on it, as well as some constant care.

Both Bradleys speak enthusiastically when asked to tell about their house. They bought it as the result of a mock redecorating job that Paula did in the car while they were traveling. She says that she likes to do things like that and she happened to know the floor plan of the Inn and set in to remodeling and redecorating it as she thought she would like to see it. Little did she know that they were soon to be the proud owners of the old brick structure. Through good fortune, they were able to purchase the house and begin to make the necessary changes.

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They spent an enormous amount of time just ripping down old wallpaper--sometimes three layers thick--and then Tom Perotka and his crew steamed off all of the stubborn pieces that did not rip off easily.

All of the old ceilings had to come down, a dirty, dusty chore. The inside of the house literally looked as though the plaster had just fallen in big heaps all over the floors. Many partitions had to be removed and much cleaning up had to be done. As each phase of the work progressed, the Bradleys found many secrets contained within the building.

All of the old heaters and washstands from the time the building was used as an inn had to be removed, and along with them, all of the old plumbing and all of the old stove-pipe holes. With a great deal of back-breaking work, lots of devoted friends, and time, soon the old place was in readiness for revamping.

Here started the jobs of hanging new wallpaper, building bookshelves, walling up old, unneeded doorways, sanding and painting woodwork, as well as all of the floors, and putting in new electrical wiring and new climate control systems.

Alfred Mack did all of the re-wiring work for the Bradleys, which was a mammoth undertaking. The heat- and air-conditioning systems were all hidden in closet space in the center of the house, forming a sort of central core for gas, air-conditioning fluid, and water. All of the duct work is hidden, thus preserving the old charm of the house.

Two fireplaces were added to the old house, one in the library, and one in the master bedroom. These both add a great deal of charm and grace to the interior of the house. They are built out of firebrick and boast very beautiful mantels. The one original fireplace, that in the dining room, was in very bad shape when they got to it, and the whole thing had to be taken out and rebuilt with firebrick. The mortar and the bricks in it were in very poor condition and there was a very large crack in one side of the fireplace.

The work, though painstaking and slow, was very rewarding for both Paula and Ned Bradley. While she designed the remodeling of the house and much of its interior decoration, he built bookcases for the library. Mr. Bradley also had the great idea to move the trap door that goes to the attic and cupola, from the bedroom into the closet. The old hole was closed up and a new one made in the closet. The shelves in the closet were then put on wheels so that they could be pulled out, thus providing easy access to the attic.

The kitchen is also of Paula's design. It is an open, airy sort of kitchen with wonderful working space. The center hosts a beautiful array of bright, shining copper pots and kettles. The floor is all done with individual tiles, hand laid by the Bradleys themselves. In the back of the kitchen is a cozy little nook, which again is the remodeling and carpentry handiwork of Ned Bradley. It includes a handsome settle with bookcases on either side.

Some of the interesting things about the house include the fact that the woodwork is different in each room. It seems to be much fancier where the room was for company, for instance the front parlor, where the

woodwork is much more ornate than in the back room, now the library. In each room one will find different and beautiful examples of panels and cornices of woodwork.

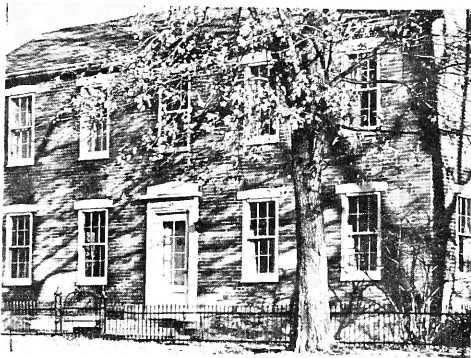
Another pleasant surprise is the fact that many of the chandeliers are all lit by candlelight, rather than by electricity. Also, it is nice to note that the graceful banister that leads up the gently curving staircase is the original one that was put in the house in the 1850's.

There was also work to be done outside. The Bradleys found that they had to tuckpoint the walls in places, as well as repair or replace a few of the bricks that were in the original walls. Most of the walls were in fairly good shape and were not in need of major repair, but were given a thorough coating of silicone spray to help protect and waterproof them. All of the outside woodwork had to be stripped and repainted, and the roof was repaired and repainted. The cupola was also stripped of its many coatings of old paint and redone, and it got a new roof. All of its windows were sent out to be repaired and some of the glass replaced, which was a demanding thing due to their unusual architecture.

When the Bradleys first began their work on the house, they found in it a set of Victorian furniture. This furniture remains in the front bedroom, on loan from Principia. The room is a light, sort of whimsical one, with flowery wallpaper and its fantasy furniture. The woodwork in this room is very severe, but handsome in its unique way.

The Bradleys were both excited that all of the furniture that they had been collecting for many years fit so perfectly into the new setting. It is predominately eighteenth century French and English, with the one bedroom done in the Victorian furniture that is of the same period as the house. The interior is very beautiful and gracious, but has a wonderful sense of comfort and coziness that makes it a home.





THE MC NAIR-HOSMER HOUSE

The McNaair-Hosmer House, which is located on Mill Street across from Fountain Square Park, is another fine example of Elsayh preservation. A short time ago the Hosmers bought the house, and due to his great appreciation of history and old homes, Dr. Hosmer decided to restore the house for his family's use.

The McNairs, who moved to Elsayh in 1857 from Pennsylvania, built the house and lived there until about 1905, when they moved to Peoria. The eldest McNairs, Thomas and Elizabeth, had two sons, William and Robert. Robert was the businessman brother, a bachelor who handled the financial side of many McNair enterprises. William was the more thoughtful and ingenious, working on the numerous inventions the brothers promoted, and keeping a series of diaries that have become a prime source of information about 19th century Elsayh. William had two sons, Tommy and Eugene, who grew up in the house. Both married local girls before the family moved. The descendants of the Elsayh McNairs, including Mrs. Beulah McNair Carpenter, a daughter of Tommy born in Elsayh, now live in California.

When the McNairs decided to sell the house in about 1952, Mrs. Minna Johnson bought it. Mrs. Johnson did much to improve the house, as well as preserve it from the effects of time. She made a few modifications and changes in her restoration, but did not change the original floor plan. Some of the modifications that were made at this time included the addition of a fireplace and chimney and the removal of a picket fence, which was replaced with a black iron gothic one. Mrs. Johnson also put in a new stairway and banister as well as paneling much of the house.

After Mrs. Minna Johnson lived in the house, her daughter, Miss Kathryn Johnson lived there and kept it up. She continued to preserve it until the Hosmers bought it.

The Hosmer family has now made quite a number of changes in the house and is still working on it. Two of the major projects in the work have been to add a bedroom in the back of the house, on the second level, and close in a porch, which is now the family room. The Hosmers also decided to modernize the kitchen. Mrs. Hosmer designed all of the new cabinets and then these were custom made and installed. The kitchen is now refurbished with all new and modern appliances and conveniences.

The Hosmers have had a St. Louis architect help them in some of the planning and work, as well as in the design of the addition. Mr. Cotton, the architect, suggested that the Hosmers use cedar stained shingles for the outside covering of both the addition and the garage which the Hosmers also added to the premises. This covering makes these portions of the house blend in very well with the surroundings.

The Hosmers also decided that added heat would be helpful in making the house more comfortable for the family, so they installed an in-the-floor duct system. They also put in a pump that pumps ground water from the well into the creek. They had the entire foundation encased in styrofoam, as well, in order to better insulate the house.

When the Hosmers first moved into the house, there was a large utility room on the back of it. This was converted into three smaller rooms: a bathroom, a coat-closet, and a smaller utility room. In a larger front room, the one where Mrs. Johnson added the fireplace, floor to ceiling bookshelves have been built. Phil Peterson did much of the handiwork on these.

HISTORICAL FEATURES

The Hosmers also discovered some things of historical interest in their work on the house. One thing of particular interest to Dr. Hosmer is the fact that the size of the window openings has been changed. At some point, they were made smaller by the addition of a row of bricks inside of the original openings. The gables on the roof have also been long since modified compared to how they looked in 1857. When the work first began, they found lots of old bottles and other old things in both the basement and the well.

Dr. Hosmer has found that practicality, in all of the proceedings, has been of great importance. They have been working slowly but surely, being careful to respect and preserve what is already there -- in this case, the original structure -- and then adapting it to the family. It is becoming a very beautiful and comfortable home.

The persistent preservation work on this house has left it now about one third McNair, with the other two thirds about equal parts Johnson and Hosmer. This one is an important house to the historical preservation effort in Elsayh because it stands in an extensive row of well preserved homes. Even though the Hosmers do still have some work left to do on the inside, the outside of the house is complete for all to enjoy.

BATES-MACK HOUSE

Perhaps the most miraculous example of recent restoration in Elsay is that of the Bates-Mack house. Until Alfred and Inge Mack bought the house last year, it had stood vacant for almost twenty years, at first growing more picturesque, then more desolate, and finally arriving at an almost irretrievable state of decay. Windows were broken and vandals had been inside. Rot had set in and the hillside behind the house had slipped.

Through the years, a number of people tried to buy the house. The chief obstacle was one of inheritance, for when the last inhabitant of the house, a Piggott, died, it was left to two sisters. Further deaths, removals, moves, and marriages, so complicated the question of ownership that prospective buyers were unable to straighten it out. It took someone with special persistence, like that of the Macks, to unravel the whole problem.

The house is not as old as many Elsay dwellings, being the second one to have occupied the site, the first having burned shortly before this one was built in 1891. However, the house is very important because it is the only example of Gothic Revival architecture in Elsay.

The restoration work included a multitude of jobs. In fact, if one wanted to see the Macks, one could be almost sure to find them busy on some phase of the restoration, for the better part of a year. The most important work was structural -- strengthening and repairing the foundation and framing. This work involved jacking up the house and stripping it down to the bare studs, then rebuilding it with new sheathing and siding. Now it is much stronger than it was originally. For a while it looked truly skeletal. One could stand in the street and look right through it to the hillside behind.

The rebuilding included complete insulation and a full job of replastering. The window frames, sills, and windows all had to be torn out and rebuilt. Now they have been restored to their original condition. Because of the old style architecture involved, the windows had to be specially made.



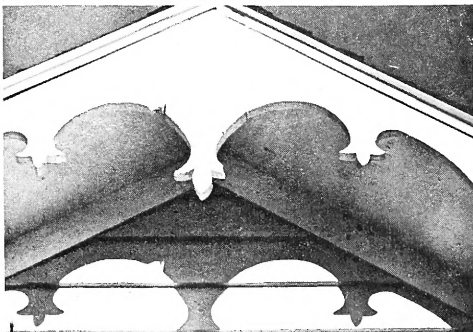
BATES-MACK HOUSE BEFORE RESTORATION

The roof too was resheathed and replaced. The plumbing, which was lacking in the original house, was added. The old chimney, which vented the stove, was taken apart and rebuilt. Central air conditioning and heating systems were added, while special care was taken to retain the original appearance of the structure as well as to hide the air ducts.

DECORATIVE CARPENTRY

The Gothic bargeboards, of a simple trefoil design, had to be largely replaced, so Mr. Mack, with the aid of Glenn, his son, made a pattern from an old sample. They not only rebuilt the decayed portions, but also carried the motif over onto the newly built parts of the house.

These new portions, designed by Mrs. Mack, conform throughout to the old style and feeling of the original house. Included are a modern kitchen, a bathroom, and a garage with a studio apartment above it. Thus, the house now has two bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining room, a living room, two bathrooms (one on each floor), and the garage and apartment.



BATES-MACK HOUSE COMPLETED



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The Macks have further protected the old landmark by building an eight foot retaining wall in back to shelter the house from mud slides and debris from the steep hill behind. They have also extended the stone wall from the Maybeck gas station up La Salle Street and across the front of the property.

The immense amount of time, patience, love, and funds that the Macks put into this project is something that the village will be grateful for for a long time. Without this house, the village would lack a dimension that it now has. Contractor, C. T. Perotka, whose fine work in the village has been a great asset to many restorers, did much of the work of restoration along with the Macks, as did Glenn, their son.

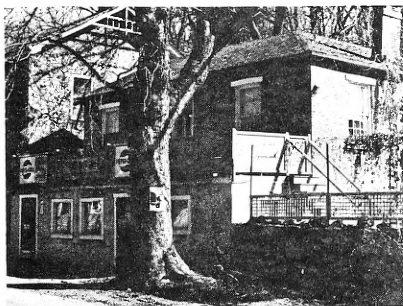
Not long ago, the old house was a worrisome fire hazard. The village board had even talked about the possibility of razing it to protect surrounding structures. Its rebirth has been the result of real vision and commitment of the sort that lies at the core of whatever strength Historic Elsay Foundation has -- the dedication of its members.

The current occupant of the house is HEF member Theodosia Lanigan.

HUSS-ANDERSON HOUSE

One of the more charming restored Elsah residences is the Huss-Anderson house. Mrs. Anderson bought it in 1969 and began to turn it back into the structure that it was when it was first built prior to the Civil War.

The house was first built and owned by a shoecobbler, Lawrence Huss, some of whose descendants, including the McDows and Edward Keller, still live in Elsah. A few years ago, the house was unfortunately converted into a cafe and beauty parlor by the addition of a concrete block structure to the front of the house. Getting this concrete block off of the front of the house proved to be a major undertaking for Mrs. Anderson, but she was determined to return the structure to its original condition. When the block was being taken off, the front of the house almost came with it and a crack that ran up the south wall of it required extensive repair. Much of the brickwork and rockwork had to be repaired where the concrete block had been attached.



Many things had to be added to the house, such as new plumbing, heating, and air conditioning. Mrs. Anderson also put a new roof on the house, as well as on the barn out in back of it. One thing that was nice about the house when she started to work on it, was the fact that none of the old walls had to be removed, and no new walls or dividers had to be added, but even so, there proved to be a mammoth amount of nitty-gritty cleaning to do.

Because of a water leakage problem in the house, especially on the lower level, a concrete floor was poured outside of the front of the house. This is painted red and looks like bricks. The inside of the lower level also had to be sealed with concrete in order to stop further leakage.

The grounds outside of the house were in very bad shape when Mrs. Anderson bought it, but now they are mostly planted with myrtle and are very charming. A brick walk leads through it to the back patio and door.

Mrs. Anderson found that many of the old ceilings had to be torn out and redone with newer materials because of their very poor condition; however, the original ceilings still exist in the den and the upstairs bedroom, as well as in one of the lower level bedrooms. Another note of interest is that Mrs. Anderson saved the original bathtub that was in the house and it is now in use in her bathroom.

HISTORICAL SECRETS

Mrs. Anderson has had fun finding out the secrets of the old house. One of the most interesting ones is that during the time the shoecobbler, Mr. Huss, owned the house, he made shoes right there, and so he had to have a place to hide his leather and skins. The place he hid them is in one of the lower bedrooms. There is a little trap door that opens into the space between the ceiling of that room and the floor of the room above, providing a very nice little niche for all of his leather goods.

The most major undertaking of the project was that of reconstructing the stairs and little porch that come off the upstairs level in the front of the house. This was done with the aid of an old ferro-type that showed how the house originally looked when it was first built. Although it no longer has the lattice work around the steps or the tall picket fence, the house looks very much as it appeared in the early days of its history.

It took a great deal of devotion and persistence for Mrs. Anderson to undertake and finish the job of cleaning up and preserving this old house, now a useful and charming building in our village. This restoration is especially important because it re-establishes the appearance of a house on the south end of a series of seven nineteenth century dwellings that form a row on the east side of Mill Street.



ROBERT CONNELL RENOVATES EARLY ELSAH HOME

Mr. Robert Connell bought his house in October of 1964, but a great deal of work had to be done before the house could be lived in, so he didn't move in until April of 1965. For about a year (from April 1965 to April 1966), Mr. Connell lived in one room of the house and used the well water. Then he gradually finished one room at a time, expanding his living quarters as he restored the house.

The house has a fascinating history behind it. Its first known owners were Henry and Eliza Thiele, who owned lot two of block eleven, upon which they built a stone house. They sold it to the Christian Lohrs for about \$650.00 in September of 1863. In 1865 it was sold again and, thereafter, it was bought and sold about nine more times for varying amounts of money. During these times, it housed a doctor and a feed store owner, as well as many others, up until October, 1964, when its present owner, Mr. Bob Connell became its inhabitant. In the course of all of the buying and selling, two more lots were acquired. A Mr. Selsby apparently bought both lots one and three, those on either side of the house, so that the amount of property is now fairly extensive.

The house itself was built around 1859, and is, at present, the product of numerous additions and alterations. It is thought that the house started out as a small stone cottage with a brick fireplace in about the center of it. Mr. Connell has recently unearthed the inside of the cottage and the fireplace in his basement. It is also possible that there was a frame second story level that had a couple of bedrooms, but the lower stone cottage was the main part of the house.

The original entrance was on the Mill Street side of the house, underneath what is now a main story side window. There were windows all around it, and as far as can be determined, it sat level with the ground, rather than underground. Due to flooding and high water, from the creek, the owners filled in the area with dirt and the window openings were walled up halfway with brick. Then it was apparently added onto, so that the upper two levels became the living areas of the house. At the same time, the entrance was moved around to the side of the building that faces Maple Street. The mansard roof was added between 1890 and 1895 when the owners moved upstairs completely.

When Mr. Connell began, the house was in great need of repair, and it was thought that it was beyond the point that it could be repaired or saved. He found that although the inside was quite shaky, the outside was structurally sound. The floors



had sunk rather badly and Bob says that one bedroom floor upstairs was so weak that it was like jumping on a trampoline to walk across it. At one point, when this floor and ceiling area was being replaced, one could see all the way into the attic. It was apparently quite an experience to stand below and see the structure of the mansard roof with the walls inside of it, just hanging there looking like they might fall at any minute. The only original floor (the old wide plank type) that was left in the house, it the one in the living room. All of the others had to be replaced due to the effects of time and rot.

Mr. Connell also had to put in plumbing, a hot water heater, and central heating because there had been none up until that time. Franklin stoves, on the first level, had provided the only heat, and a pump and dry sink in one corner of the kitchen had provided the water for the house. There were apparently just four simple string and bulb fixtures in the house, with no other electrical outlets, so the house had to be wired completely, including a 220 volt line for the stove and other large electrical appliances.

GUEST EDITOR OF THIS ISSUE

Sara Eubank, currently a student contract worker at Principia College, did the work on this issue of Elsah History, including research, writing, layout, and most of the photography. Sara will graduate this June with a BA in Communications.

Mr. Connell has closed in what was a screened porch, to be his sitting and TV room, and his inside access to the basement, which he has recently begun to restore. At the outset of this part of the "house cleaning," Bob found that about two feet of dirt and mud had to be excavated out of the old stone part of the building. It is not yet certain whether this dirt was flooded in, or whether it was put there when the area around the house was filled. In the excavation, Bob found several old bottles, among which are some medicine bottles. One of these was so well protected that it still has the original label on it. It is possible that these may have belonged to Dr. Benjamin Farley when he lived in the house and had his office down in the stone part of the building. Bob also found an old porcelain vegetable dish that is practically unharmed.

The floors in the old stone part of the house were made of whitening which is limestone that is ground and then burned. This soft, smooth substance was laid on the floor in 18" sections, each of which was separated by two-by-fours. Then a second layer, about two inches thick, was laid on top of the first. The walls were apparently done this same way, but much of the whitening has peeled off over the years because of the damage done from mud and water. The walls down in the basement are about 18" thick at the top and about 24" thick at the base, so they are very sound and strong. Bob intends to finish the basement restoration during the winter.

Right now, Mr. Connell is working on the front porch of the house and is progressing very rapidly. He is awaiting delivery of the windows for it because they had to be specially made. The door is an elegant, oval-paneled Victorian one that had to be stripped of about twenty coats of paint and now is waiting the finishing touches to match the porch.

The Connell house affords a very interesting study to anyone interested in Elsay history, because of its many different owners, additions, and modifications. It is indeed an extraordinary restoration, particularly since the house was in such poor shape when Mr. Connell started. The great insight and persistence that Bob has had, have been very worthwhile as evidenced by the beautiful home that occupies the site.

HENRY B. BECHTOLD

The Elsay area has recently been saddened by the passing of Mr. Henry B. Bechtold, of Beltrees, a lifelong resident of the township.

Mr. Bechtold, whose parents immigrated to Elsay township from Germany as young people, worked as a farmer, as a helper in various capacities on the Ames and Turner estates, and for thirty-four years in the maintenance department of Principia College.

A very helpful historical informant, Mr. Bechtold was generous to HEF in supplying information about the area in former times. Since he attained the age of eighty-two, his memories reached far back to the end of the nineteenth century. We are fortunate to have a taped interview of him made quite recently.

Mr. Bechtold has numerous relatives in the district. Those living in the Village of Elsay include his sister, Mrs. Annetta Cronin, a nephew, Mr. Robert Cronin, and a niece, Mrs. Pat Farmer.

HOUSE TOUR

This year's house tour will be held on Mother's Day from 12:30 until 5:30.

As of now, eight houses will be open, some for the first time. Among other things, the tour will feature the first opening of the Riverview House, a part of which is the oldest house in Elsay. It will also include the first general showing of the mural of Elsay historic scenes painted on the stairway of the McNair-Hosmer House by Glenn Felch.

In addition, the Village Hall and the Civic Center will be open for craft and art sales, and for a slide show of historic pictures of Elsay.

The Doll Museum, the Elsay Country Store, and both churches will also be open.

Visitors wishing to dine before touring will find Schulte's House, in Grafton, offering a variety of fine food.